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Introduction to the Special Issue

Marginal Hubs: On Conviviality Beyond the Urban in Asia

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Abstract

This Special Issue explores the forms of coexistence that emerge in what we call ‘marginal hubs’: sites that appear geographically or political marginal, but which emerge as sites of intense and often volatile sociability, including border posts, container markets, industrial workshops, and pilgrim encampments. Such sites, which often come into being suddenly and remote from the great urban centres, fit easily neither within the framework of the Asian urban, nor of the continent’s villages and small towns. By exploring the forms of sociability important to everyday life in such places we seek to widen the spectrum of settings that are recognised by scholars across the humanities and social sciences as having the potential for offering productive insights into understanding how heterogeneity is handled in Asia and beyond. This Introduction sets out the theoretical stakes of such an approach, as well as introducing the papers in the Special Issue.

Introduction¹

Recent work in anthropology, history and related disciplines has cast much light on the varying ways in which people living in Asia’s great urban centres have forged collective forms of life across multiple boundaries, including those of religion, ethnicity, language, profession, and class. Studies of paradigmatic urban centres across the continent—ranging from Bukhara² and Istanbul³ to Bombay/Mumbai⁴ and Karachi⁵—have addressed the ways in which the authorities

¹ Magnus Marsden wishes to acknowledge support from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme 669 132 – TRODITIES, ‘Yiwu Trust, Global Traders and Commodities in a Chinese International City’. Madeleine Reeves wishes to acknowledge support from the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research under the International Collaborative Research Grant, ‘Conviviality and Contention in Southern Kyrgyzstan: An Infrastructural Approach.’ Both of us would like to thank the organisers of the ‘InterAsian Connections V’ conference held in Seoul in April 2016 and acknowledge funding from the SSRC without which it would have been impossible to hold the workshop out of which this collection of articles arises. We are indebted to the participants and discussants in the ‘Marginal Hubs’ workshop for their participation.

²C. Humphrey, M. Marsden and V. Skvirskaja. ‘Cosmopolitanism and the city: interaction and coexistence in Bukhara’, in *The Other Global City*, ed. S. Mayaram, (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 202-232.

³ L. Can, ‘Connecting People: A Central Asian Sufi Network in Turn-of-the-Century Istanbul’, *Modern Asian Studies* vol. 46, no. 2, 2012, pp. 373-401.

⁴ N. Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). G. Prakash, *Mumbai Fables* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵ L. Ring, *Zenana: Everyday Peace in a Karachi Apartment Building* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

and inhabitants of such cities have handled, to varying degrees of success, social heterogeneity. There has also been growing recognition of the danger of romanticising or over-exaggerating the innate capacity of such great urban centres to contain the pressures and strains associated with social heterogeneity. A variety of recent studies, rather, have brought attention to the ways in which conflict and violence, often played out in the language of (or at least represented as being about) collective forms of identity, are an integral if not defining feature of Asia's urban centres.⁶ They have also explored how the very language of urban 'cosmopolitanism' can be invoked by those 'looking to assert or assume the mantle of power' to exclude others from political life.⁷ Parallel to the emergence of this body of work on the Asian city as a site of diversity, scholars working in rural settings have sought to challenge the conventional notion that villages and small towns are inevitably homogeneous or devoid of social heterogeneity.⁸ Such studies have brought attention to the forms of circulation and migration that are a critical feature of village life in many parts of Asia. They have also highlighted the nuanced sensibilities that rural people demonstrate in the ways in which they handle, think about and engage with the forms of diversity that arises from such circulations.⁹

The contributors to this Special Issue build on these important bodies of literature yet do so on the basis of empirical material relating to the experience of everyday life in contexts that fit easily neither within the framework of the Asian urban nor of the continent's villages and 'small towns'.¹⁰ The type of settings through which the papers explore questions of how people from very different backgrounds seek to live side-by-side (if not always in an inconclusively sociable way) include border posts, sprawling markets on the urban periphery of mega-cities, 'villages in the city' that are home of industrial workshops, and pilgrim encampments located in the mountain wilderness. A central aim for this collection of papers is to document and theorise the forms of sociality important within such settings.

In order to do so, we advance two central theses that run through the case studies in this collection. First, the backdrop to these case studies are sites that straddle the often taken-for-granted boundary between the rural and the urban, the modern and the historic, the marginal and the central. We suggest that such sites represent a specific type of setting: the 'marginal hub.' By exploring the forms of sociability important to everyday life in such marginal hubs we hope to widen the spectrum of settings that are recognised by scholars across the humanities and social sciences as having the potential for offering productive insights into understanding how heterogeneity is handled in Asia and beyond. Second, we have found the concept of 'conviviality' especially helpful to understand the complex forms of sociability on display in the marginal hubs on which the papers focus. As the articles collected in the Special Issue

⁶ N. Green, Nile. 'The Demographics of Dystopia: The Muslim City in Asia's Future' *History and Anthropology* 27 vol. 3, 2016, pp. 273-295. L. Gayer, *Ordered Disorder and the Struggle for the City* (London: Hurst, 2014),

⁷ B. Grant, 'Cosmopolitan Baku,' *Ethnos* vol. 75, no. 2, 2010, p. 125.

⁸ L. Heslop, *The Making of the Merchant Middle Class in Sri Lanka: An Ethnography of Small Town Life*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh; M. Marsden, 'Muslim Cosmopolitans?: Transnational Life in Northern Pakistan', *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol 67 no. 1. 2008, pp. 213-248.

⁹ V. Gidwani and K. Sivaramakrishnan, 'Circular migration and rural cosmopolitanism in India'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 37 no. 1-2, 2003, pp. 339-367; M. Saxer, 'Pathways: A Concept, Field Site, and Methodological Approach to Study Remoteness and Connectivity', *Himalaya*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2016, pp. 105-119.

¹⁰ On the notion of the Asian urban, see P. Van der Veer, 'The Future of Utopia', *History and Anthropology*, vol. 27 no. 3, 2016, pp. 251-261.

document, the social dynamics of marginal hubs should be conceived of neither in terms of breakdown and dystopia, nor as utopian forms of sweetly reasonable coexistence. Thinking through the social dynamics of such sites in terms of conviviality shifts attention away from strivings for cosmopolitanism or toleration and coexistence and towards the intrinsic ambivalence of living together across local differences, which are themselves often inflected with the dynamics of power and exclusion, or what Emily Yeh felicitously calls ‘coercive amity’.¹¹ What emerges especially clearly from a consideration of the pervasive ambivalence of such ‘living-with’ is that it is necessarily full of frictions and misunderstandings.¹² Empirical explorations of such settings stand well-placed to provide the basis for original and critical perspectives on conviviality’s value as an analytical device for understanding the modes through which diversity is handled and conceptualised in particular settings and on a day-to-day basis.

The two tropes that we have introduced here—the ‘marginal hub’ and ‘conviviality beyond the urban centre’—weave in and out of the various papers that make up this collection. These terms served as organising devices for the workshop, part of the 2016 SSRC ‘Inter-Asian Connections V’ conference in Seoul, at which these papers were initially presented, and we have returned to them repeatedly in discussion within and beyond the workshop. Some of the articles in this collection foreground one or the other of the two terms; others explore the relationship between the two more symmetrically. We have sought not to be prescriptive in how authors engage the terms across divergent settings and bodies of empirical material. Our hope, nonetheless, is that collectively the papers published together here provide new theoretical and empirical insights into the everyday work of living together in Asia beyond the region’s great urban centres.

We proceed by elaborating on the implications of this approach for two broad scholarly conversations concerning, on the one hand, the specificity of the urban as a site of social interaction in Asia and, on the other, the value of conviviality as an analytic for exploring dynamics of coexistence. After situating our approach in critical conversation with these broader debates, we outline more specifically what such an approach to everyday conviviality in marginal hubs might look like. We draw out four dimensions of the enactment of conviviality in marginal hubs that we regard as especially important: ephemerality, materiality, volatility and historicity, and elaborate each through a discussion of individual papers in the collection.

Approaching conviviality beyond the urban centre

One especially salient aspect of the marginal hub as a site of social interaction is the extent to which such settings often emerge not from *longue durée* histories but in the context of far more abrupt, and often short-lived, historical developments. If work on Asia’s paradigmatic urban

¹¹ Cf. R. Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); M. Liu, *Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); E. Yeh, ‘Living Together in Lhasa: Ethnic Relations, Coercive Amity and Subaltern Cosmopolitanism,’ in S. Mayaram, *The Other Global City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 54-85.

¹² H. Al-Mohammad, ‘Towards an Ethics of Being-With: Intertwinements of Life in Post-Invasion Basra’, *Ethnos*, vol. 75 no.4, 2010, pp. 425-446.

centres tends to focus on the modes of living together that have been worked out by diverse communities over decades or centuries of shared residence and interaction, then the type of setting on which the papers in this volume focus are frequently the product of short-term historical processes that abruptly throw people from very different backgrounds and with few if any visible histories of past interaction together. The inhabitants of urban neighbourhoods typically witness successive waves of incomers from contrasting regions and socio-economic backgrounds, and each such wave leaves social infrastructures behind that may be adopted, adapted or violently appropriated by future generations of migrant, sojourner, or exile.¹³ Marginal hubs, by contrast, emerge sporadically and often suddenly. They bring people together with little in the way of a history of collective interaction. Given that their existence is closely tied up with rapidly changing political and economic dynamics, marginal hubs fill few of the criteria that would help to forecast the prospect of future social stability.

Studying the everyday social dynamics that are found in such marginal hub raises important questions about conviviality. The almost exclusive focus in the existing literature on social heterogeneity on ‘the urban’ as a backdrop for everyday forms of conviviality has produced detailed empirical and analytical discussions of the practices that enable people to fashion relations and lives across boundaries and divides.¹⁴ Yet there remains a lingering assumption in some scholarship that it is the urban itself that provides people with the cultural, social and affective resources to learn, embody and deploy such practices.¹⁵ Against this intellectual backdrop, scholarly recognition of the importance of conviviality to living with difference in a wider range of settings has the potential to raise new questions concerning the historical and cultural sources of convivial practices, sensibilities, and knowledges. On what resources do people in marginal hubs draw in their attempts to forge social ties and relations across boundaries of difference but also to categorise and define one another? How are social bonds and ties fashioned in the apparent absence of past histories, stories and memories of collective social life?

The articles in this Special Issue all attend to the broader processes of politics and economy that are critical to understand the emergence and dynamics of such sites. Marginal hubs do not emerge from thin air. Rather, as the papers in this collection illuminate, they are connected to identifiable processes including the globalisation of the world’s supply chains, the securitization of boundaries between nation-states, and the politicization of ethnic and religious differences. Such processes are rarely associated with the emergence of harmonious forms of collective living or, indeed, of the type of social contexts in which such modes of life take root. Be it in the need for a motivated labour force or for unambiguous divisions of loyalty and territory at contested national boundaries, marginal hubs are integrally connected to wider and often exploitative and violent processes that are shot-through with multiple and overlapping forms of inequality. How such processes come to be ignored, acknowledged, diffused or

¹³ E.g. J. Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent, 1865-1923* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007), J. Nucho, *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ E.g. C. Humphrey and V. Skvirskaja (eds.), *Explorations of the Post-Cosmopolitan City*, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012); S. Maryam (ed.), *The Other Global City* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁵ E.g. A. Amin, ‘Land of Strangers,’ *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-8.

jokingly reworked in everyday encounters are questions deserving fine-grained ethnographic attention.

Actually-existing coexistence

The decidedly empirical perspective on conviviality that we pursue here as the effortful labour of actually-existing coexistence sits in sympathetic but critical conversation with a growing scholarly literature on cosmopolitanism and what has sometimes been glossed as a ‘cosmopolitan vision’.¹⁶ Cosmopolitanism has been characterised by advocates and critics alike as defined by forms of orientation or attitude in which difference is unmarked, unnoticed, and irrelevant to the texture of daily life. The cosmopolitan subject enjoys the forms of freedom and mutual recognition that flourish in contemporary urban life; they experience difference as enriching rather than threatening, such that ‘openness’ itself becomes a mark of distinction or mutual identification. Cosmopolitanism in this sense is defined both by an attitudinal or affective component—it emphasises an orientation, a way of being and relating that is marked by openness and respect, by tolerance and recognition—and by a kind of ‘world-recognition’: the capacity to relate to, or apprehend the world, the ‘cosmo-’ as a singularity. It is in this respect that most western genealogies of cosmopolitanism trace the term beyond Kant to Diogenes (412-323 BC) who responded to the question of where he was from by asserting that ‘I am a citizen of the world’ (*kosmopolitês*).

Cosmopolitan literature in this tradition has enquired into the contemporary global conditions within which, as Paul Gilroy puts it, ‘exposure to otherness involves more than jeopardy.’¹⁷ And if the freedom to be ‘open to the world’ often appears as an elite privilege—the perspective, as Craig Calhoun sharply puts it, of the frequent traveller moving effortlessly between airport lounges¹⁸—much recent scholarship has illuminated the cosmopolitanism of those with limited political and material resources for international travel.¹⁹ Indeed, it is notable in the anthropological and historical scholarship on Asia how often depictions of cosmopolitanism are qualified or hyphenated as discrepant, subaltern or vernacular. There are accounts of Muslim cosmopolitanism²⁰ and Buddhist cosmopolitanism,²¹ just as there are of

¹⁶ U. Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, transl. Ciaran Cronin. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

¹⁷ P. Gilroy, ‘Beyond Assimilation: Highland Shortbread and the Politics of Belonging in Britain.’ *Heritage and Identity*. Heritage Lottery Fund, 2004.

¹⁸ C. Calhoun, ‘The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism.’ *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 4, 2002, pp. 869-897.

¹⁹ Eg. U. Kothari, ‘Global Peddlers and Local Networks: Migrant Cosmopolitans.’ *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 26, no. 3, 2008, pp. 500-516.

²⁰ P. Werbner ‘Vernacular Cosmopolitanism as an Ethical Disposition: Sufi Networks, Hospitality and Translocal Inclusivity.’ In L. Baskins and A. van Sandwijk, eds, *Islamic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 223-240; M. Marsden, ‘Islamic cosmopolitanism out of Muslim Asia: Hindu-Muslim business co-operation between Odessa and Yiwu’, *History and Anthropology* vol, 29, no. 1, 2017, pp. 121-139; R. M. Feener and J. Gedacht (eds.) *Challenging Cosmopolitanism: Coercion, Mobility and Displacement in Islamic Asia*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2018).

²¹ K.D. Bhutia, ‘Local Agency in Global Movements: Negotiating Forms of Buddhist Cosmopolitanism in the Young Men’s Buddhist Associations of Darjeeling and Kalimpong.’ *Transcultural Studies*, vol. 2016, no. 1, pp. 121-148.

Black cosmopolitanism,²² working class cosmopolitanism,²³ and youth cosmopolitanism.²⁴ Openness to difference, such literature suggests, is itself a situated, localised and learned capacity. It is nurtured in some contexts more than in others. It is precisely in conditions of subordination or inequality that one may not afford *not* to be ‘open to difference’.

Such insights do important work in moving cosmopolitanism from the realm of normative statements into empirical enquiry. They have helped shed ‘cosmopolitan theory’ of some of its elitist and eurocentric biases. And they have pointed to the ways in which the identification of others as insufficiently cosmopolitan, insufficiently open can be used to subtend and reproduce relations of inequality.²⁵ The papers in this collection build sympathetically on these insights and critiques. Yet we also take as our starting point that the ‘embedded contradictions’ of cosmopolitanism require something other than its repeated qualification of hyphenation. The claim of an ‘openness to difference’, we suggest, implies a perceiving (‘open’) human subject who is not always-already constituted by relations of power, full of ambivalences, full of contradictory orientations, for whom embrace and fear of ‘difference’ may be less polar opposites than two sides of the same coin.²⁶ Moreover, it implies that such attitudes and feelings are legible, transparent and durable: that they are not subject to the vagaries of political events, public discourses and moral panics.

Our focus on conviviality shifts attention from normative aspirations to the intrinsic ambivalence of living together across local difference, recognising that such living-with is necessarily full of frictions and misunderstandings. Such an approach draws attention to the temporal and spatial specificity of such practice: the fact that convivial relations can fizzle or snap (Nikolotov, this volume); or that they can be bound by the layered geographies of social life (Mostowlansky, this volume). In this respect, rather than assuming that marginal hubs are best thought of as being the site of urban conviviality’s other, we suggest, conversely, that a consideration of everyday modes of dealing with diversity within such settings can illuminate not only the practices of conviviality deployed in marginal hubs but also the ways in which people think about and conceptualise these. This is because the people who inhabit, govern, and move through marginal hubs are attuned to the forms of diversity that characterise their worlds, and are often necessarily reflexive about their modes of engaging with these. In this sense, recognising the ‘performed’ or strategic elements of conviviality (Chambers, this volume) should not lead us to assume that such relations are therefore either inauthentic or

²² I.K. Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005).

²³ P. Werbner, ‘Global Pathways: Working Class Cosmopolitans and the Creation of Transnational Ethnic Worlds’, *Social Anthropology* vol. 7 no. 1, 1999, pp. 17–37.

²⁴ S. Scheld, ‘Youth Cosmopolitanism: Clothing, the City, and Globalization in Dakar, Senegal,’ *City and Society* vol. 1, no. 2, 2007, pp. 232–253.

²⁵ N. Glick Schiller and A. Irving, ‘Introduction: What’s in a Word? What’s in a Question?’ In N. Glick Schiller and A. Irving, eds., *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*. (Oxford and New York: Berghahn), pp. 1–22.

²⁶ S. Schielke *Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence before and after 2011*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); J. Stacey, ‘Whose Cosmopolitanism? The Violence of Idealization and the Ambivalence of Self’, in N. Glick Schiller and A. Irving, eds., *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*. (Oxford and New York: Berghahn), pp. 1–22.

narrowly self-serving.²⁷ They reflect instead the intrinsic complexity of a concept that is both analytical and normative: a way of examining social relations that is also a moral model for society worth striving for.

This ambivalence also points to the open-endedness and volatility of convivial relations. We do not presume that the such co-figuring is necessarily easy, comfortable, or premised upon an ‘openness to the world.’ Conviviality entails, rather, forms of everyday practices that have uncertain trajectories: a joke misplaced might lead to spiralling violence or, if interpreted and received through different registers, to the emergence of social relations that are characterised by peace and harmony. Because they bring together people in the context of testing times and across vexed spaces, marginal hubs provide a tangible context within which to explore the multiple and unfolding trajectories of convivial modes of living together. We turn now to exploring these dimensions of the marginal hub in more depth, through reference to the individual papers in the collection.

Ephemerality

As we have noted above, marginal hubs often arise from abrupt and shifting historical processes: the search for new markets, new resources, new supply chains, or new security imperatives. As such, specific attention also needs to be paid to the ephemeral nature of conviviality in such settings. Much work on cosmopolitanism emphasises the importance of durable spaces, cultural traditions and institutions to maintaining carefully balanced patterns of relation between different groups in society. By contrast, the articles in this volume point to the importance of ways of speaking and behaving that are far less securely moored into the social fabric or cultural traditions of marginal hubs. Convivial practices that are inherently ephemeral include specific types of social interaction, such as jokes, banter, or off-hand remarks. How do we assess the role that such hard to trace forms of social interaction play in peoples’ attempts to live-with one another? Do certain types of practice (such the sharing of food or of tools or of workspace) inevitably result in convivial relations? Alternatively, might practices that are convivial simultaneously make possible sociability across various boundaries yet also bring difference, division and distinction to the attention of participants: that may enhance or also disrupt the ability or willingness to handle diversity?²⁸ Under what circumstances does attention to social difference—ranging from committed social investment at one end of the spectrum to irony and cynicism at the other—result in the production of the dynamic and intensive types of sociality that we are referring to as conviviality?

Tom Chambers addresses these issues with especial clarity in the context of Saharanpour, a Muslim-majority neighbourhood in Uttar Pradesh, northern India. Saharanpour is a ‘provincial urban centre’: a type of setting which, in comparison both to the subcontinent’s villages and its mega-cities, has received comparatively little attention in regional and comparative

²⁷ We build here on an extensive body of literature that records the sentiments and interest as co-produced in everyday human life. E.g. A. Silver, ‘Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology,’ *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 95, no. 6, 1990, pp. 1474-1504.

²⁸ Anthropologists have long recognised the power of hospitality to divide as much as unite guests and hosts, e.g. Charles Lindholm, *Generosity and Jealousy: The Swat Pukhtun of northern Pakistan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

scholarship. The city is widely recognised by its inhabitants as being welcoming to outsiders, not least because of the way in which it absorbed Muslim refugees in the context of the violent events of partition in 1947. It would be wrong to characterise Saharanpour as harmonious in any simple way, however: the city's Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities live rather segregated lives and there have also been violent confrontations—coded as 'religious'—in recent years. Within Saharanpour Chambers' focus is on a particularly important unit of sociality within and beyond South Asia: the *mohalla*, or neighbourhood. In Saharanpour, neighbourhoods are critical to the organisations of the city's economy: the craft industry, most especially the production of goods from wood, which are often also sold and distributed globally. In his article Chambers suggests that *mohallas* 'ferment' intense forms of sociality, which we might think of in terms of 'conviviality'. He suggests however that it would be an over-simplification to understand such convivial modes of being simply in terms of the fashioning of harmonious intra-communal relations, even though many of the cases he explores involve ties and friendships that stretch across communal boundaries. Indeed, Chambers argues that there is a powerful duality in such forms of conviviality: they build bridges across boundaries important to city dwellers' everyday lives, but they also contain a degree of instrumentality. For Chambers, such everyday performance of conviviality also reinforces multiple 'obligations' and 'power-laden' reciprocal ties, meaning that it plays a crucial role in the way in which control over labour and production more generally in the city's *mohallas* is maintained.

In the context of intense migration, industrialization, and urbanization, Nellie Chu's article in the Special Issue addresses the complex interplay of personal affect and social control in the everyday lives of largely women workers in the Chinese garment industry. Chu brings explicit attention to the important role that marginal hubs play as sites of labour and manufacture in south China. Chu explores *jiagongchang*s (household workshops) in Guangzhou's garment district. Such *jiagongchang*s account for as much as 5% of China's production of clothing; they are of critical importance to the ability of suppliers in the city to meet a rapid demand for clothing suitable for export to various corners of the globe, from Thailand to Australia. Within Guangzhou, these *jiagongchang*s are situated within *chengzhongcun*, or "villages in the city": spaces that are not classified by Chinese legislation as urban but that have become enveloped by Guangzhou's unchecked urbanisation. As such, this type of social environment has emerged historically from the 'spatial interstices of rural/ urban, home/ factory, and state/collective'. A key theme cutting across Chu's paper, indeed, is the way in which workers—most of whom in this particular sector of the household economy are women—in *jiagongchang*s manage multiple and ambiguous boundaries in their daily lives.

For Chu, *jiagongchang*s are helpfully conceived of as being "marginal hubs" because they are "temporary sites of internal exclusion and dispossession, where the offshoring of low-cost manufacturing and the displacement of life and livelihood takes place in order to facilitate the world's supply chains for low-cost commodities". In this respect, Chu's work chimes with Thomas Chambers' recognition of the significance of Saharanpour as a site of industrial manufacture: both such urban settings are sites in which precarious labour is predominant and also rooted to specific units of sociality: the neighbourhood in Saharanpour and the 'village in the city' in Guangzhou. Yet whereas Chambers sheds light on the intersection between

masculinity and sociality to the performance of such forms of labour, in Chu's case household workshops rely on female migrant workers' 'negotiations with their feelings of displacement' and these women's ability to handle the boundary between being 'wage workers and domestic caregivers'. Chu goes beyond the temptation of seeing unrequited desire for home and family (such a powerful aspect of these women's subjectivities) as a simple issue that need to be solved by factory owners keen to maintain high levels of productivity. Instead, Chu argues that 'affection for a loved one in a distant place ... becomes a mobilizing force of low-wage labour along an uneven and disjoined chain of marginalized labour and hub of extraction'. In other words, women regard serving simultaneously as 'family caretaker and breadwinner' and 'seamstress' as furthering the possibility of their leading 'responsible' lives, which they might contrast to the 'wayward' existences of those left behind in their villages.

The capacity of women to seek meaning in their working lives in the household workshops as mothers and carers is not simply a matter of their personal or collective 'resilience'. Rather Chu deftly shows the ways in which it is not only legal and spatial boundaries that are blurred in the context of Guangzhou's *chengzhongcun*. Of central significance for the functioning of this mode of production too are blurred boundaries in the nature of social relationships, between factory owners and workers, for example, as well as between wholesale suppliers and factory owners. In this respect, Chu charts the ways in which the ability of a wholesaler to complete an order in time for a purchaser in Australia is dependent on her ability to muster the affective resources that enable a factory owner to ensure workers are willing to labour at short notice and over long hours. Chu also provides fascinating glimpses into the ways in which this mode of organising labour production not only blurs vertical relationships between factory owners and workers but is also manifested in rich relationships of care-giving and solidarity on the workshop floor: relationships which often cut-across differences in regional backgrounds. Chu deploys the concept of "diasporic intimacy," to describe the way in which migrants come together through a 'shared sense of precariousness or alienation in a foreign land, however short-lived this encounter may be'. By treating household workshops as 'temporary sites' that 'serve as fragmented and provisional resources of sociality and labour', while also recognising the forms of intimacy and care that not only emerge in but are also central to the ongoing economic role of such contexts, Chu's article sheds especially vivid light on the ambiguity of the forms of conviviality that appear to characterise everyday life in Asia's marginal hubs.

Materiality

Recent attempts to engage critically with the concept of cosmopolitanism from non-elite perspectives have dwelled extensively on the instruments and substances that facilitate openness to difference in specific contexts and settings. From recognition of the importance of the pots in which food is cooked to the rooms in which guests are hosted to the recipes used to accommodate different tastes and demonstrate knowledge of difference, anthropologists have challenged the Eurocentric notion to think of cosmopolitanism as a theory to recognise instead the way in which openness to difference is embodied and materially embedded in everyday

life.²⁹ Several of the articles in this Special Issue build on this work by bringing attention to the materiality of the expressions of conviviality evident in the marginal hubs under examination.

An overwhelmingly predominant focus for work on migration and mobility in Asia has been on the multi-dimensional implications of the resettling of rural communities in the continent's cities. Yasmin Cho's article in this Special Issue serves as an important reminder that migration to remote areas also exists, and that, as a result, margins do not serve merely as the other of the urban centre, but can come to exert a centralising pull themselves. Central to Cho's approach is a need to recognise the significance of the physical environment and peoples' conceptions of it in shaping understandings of centre and margin. Cho explores the importance to the religious experiences of Buddhist nuns in a Tibetan monastery at Yachin Gar of the site's 'remoteness and wilderness'. The Yachin Gar monastery is a Tibetan Buddhist encampment that has arisen since the 1980s in the Kham region, a space historically 'sandwiched between Central Tibet and China proper' that has maintained 'its distance from both of these powerful political entities' generating 'its own specific sociohistorical trajectories'. The monastery now forms the largest Buddhist community in China comprising 10,000 nuns, as well as 2000 monks and lay practicing people. Most of the devotees based at Yachin Gar are Tibetan nuns, but there are growing numbers of Han Chinese pilgrims. The monastery is notoriously difficult to reach: even when roads have been constructed, they are quickly washed away by floods and landslides. The nuns at the camp hail from the Tibetan Autonomous Region, but among their ranks are many followers who identify themselves as being Han Chinese.

Central to Cho's argument is that while it is conventional to focus on the cosmological position of religious centres in Tibetan Buddhism the material features of such communities should not be overlooked. Indeed, in the case of Kham, a focus on materiality and geography reveals important dimensions of the monastery's success in attracting followers. More theoretically, Cho develops the concept of the marginal hub in order to contest the notion—visible especially in the Lefebvrian notion of the 'social production of space'—that margins are inevitably produced in a 'passive or reactive way' as a result of the emergence of powerful centres. Rather, the case of Yachin Gar reveals the case of a margin that is 'explicitly sought out and produced by multiple agents and forces'. As Cho demonstrates, before the monastery emerged in Yachin Gar the setting was thought of a 'nowhere' rather than a margin. It was in the context of active acts of 'distancing' that pilgrims and nuns distanced themselves from certain things (their places of origin, polluted urban centres, or modernity itself) but in doing so made possible a new web of social relations, involving nuns, lamas, and Chinese pilgrims. In this respect, Yachin Gar was simultaneously actively constructed as a margin but also as a new type of centre. Cho's findings offer a very different geographical optic for the study of the marginal hub than those of other contributors to this Special Issue (especially Chambers and Chu) who trace the emergence of marginal hubs in urban centres as sites of immigration. As is the case,

²⁹ F. Osella and C. Osella. "'I am Gulf': The Production of Cosmopolitanism in Kozhikode, Kerala, India', in *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, eds. K. Kresse and E. Simpson (London: Hurst, 2007), pp. 323-356; M. Marsden 'Fatal Embrace: trading in hospitality on the frontiers of South and Central Asia,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol 18 no. 1. 2012, pp. 117-130

however, for the Pamiri mountain dwellers explored by Mostowlansky in his article, being remote and isolated has a range of implications for the devotees based at the camp.

Such active forms of ‘distancing’ have significant yet varied implications for the way in which Yachin Gar is experienced by those who visit its Buddhist community. On the one hand, the practices and activities of nuns in the monastery is regarded as being less intrusively observed by the Chinese authorities than is the case for more historically significant monasteries. On the other hand, being located in a remote wilderness is regarded by the nuns as making possible forms of detachment from the world that are not possible in monasteries that are less remote. The reason for this does not simply arise from the ability of nuns to detach themselves spiritual from the world, although from the perspective of the Han devotees, the remoteness of Yachin Gar intensifies their understanding of the site of the monastery as being especially pure and spiritual. Chinese Han pilgrims indeed expect a certain ‘roughness’ in Yachin Gar’s environment and associate the difficulties of reaching the site with its ability to select those who are suitable to visit. An issue of importance for the nuns from the Tibet, however, relates to the significance of monasteries to local economies and social structures. In parts of Tibet in which monasteries are located close to local communities, nuns are required to provide labour to local farmers.

Malini Sur’s ethnography of another out-of-the-way-place—the India-Bangladesh border in the Garo Hills—also directs our attention to the materiality of the marginal hub and its affordances (and limitations) for everyday convivial relations. The heavily-militarised border region in the Garo Hills, saturated with histories of state violence and asymmetrical relations between villagers and border guards, is a place today renowned for independence demands, indigenous dissidence, smuggling and trans-border abductions. This would hardly seem an environment conducive to the development of convivial relations. Yet this borderland has also been a site of enduring forms of exchange, albeit asymmetrical and partial, as Sur demonstrates through an ethnography of ritualised exchange between villagers and border forces manifest in the lending and borrowing of fragile porcelain tea-cups, the offering of rides in military vehicles, the sharing of courtyard-conversation to diminish the chronic boredom of border patrol, or the requirement to drink tea at the border. The analytical significance of such reciprocal acts is precisely that they take place in a context that is also shot through with inequality: a border-post cup-of-tea, for instance, might accompany an interrogation. Conviviality does not erase state violence. But little acts of convivial exchange—words, tea-cups, food—do serve to domesticate border, making the state “a familiar neighbourly outpost instead of a distant violent force” and helping to render life liveable under duress.

Volatility

Being convivial is not something that comes without sustained effort and social work. As with all forms of effort, conviviality entails expense and expenditure. Such expense and expenditure take multiple forms. It may be materialised as resources (economic and social), or expended as energy (creative and physical) and embodied in the forms of affects and emotions (both affectionate and hostile). The discussion of conviviality’s inherently volatile and ephemeral nature discussed above means that the outcomes of such efforts are never clear; recognition of this in turn raises the stakes and heightens the anticipation of those who invest in everyday acts

of conviviality. Indeed, continued and sustained effort itself contributes to the inherently volatile nature of convivial forms of conduct: dealing with difference in fraught settings at a day-to-day level is intense and often unsettling, with the potential for mis-understanding, mis-communication, and mis-translation never far from the horizon.

Anton Nikolotov's paper in this volume explores these themes from the perspective of a sprawling wholesale market in the shadow of the Moscow ring-road. *Sadovod* is a place where thousands of traders from South and Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine and Vietnam figure out the dynamics of co-living and co-trading in an environment segmented by classed and racialized hierarchies, shot through with the ever-present risk of scams, violence and ritualised police raids. Conviviality, in this setting "exists within an internal social structure that is far from being a romantic form of interethnic mixing." It is rather a combustible and unpredictable realm in which a 'playful' insult might lead to an invitation to *shashlyk* or a punch in the face. Making a living in such an environment demands skill—in playful banter with co-traders and prospective buyers; in 'passing' (as Indian rather than Afghan, for instance); in knowing when to flatter and when to diffuse tension with a joke or jibe. It also requires effort. The volatile conviviality of a gathering of traders for shashlyk, for instance, consists not only of threading pieces of meat onto skewers and cooking these over hot charcoal. Rather, as Nikolotov describes, from the preparation and cooking of the meat, to the ability of those gathered to engage in the forms of banter and joking required, the shashlyk gathering requires multiple forms of effort, and the ultimate outcome, which might range from somewhere on the spectrum between uproarious laughter and humour to fizzy pop combustibility, is always difficult to predict.

Jacob Nerenberg's paper takes us to another market-hub of volatile conviviality: this time in Wamena in the highlands of Indonesia's Papua province: a terminal market in a politically fraught periphery that is also a threshold between urban and rural life and between indigenous and migrant social worlds. Here, as in *Sadovod*, the market and associated minivan terminal are places of marginal gains for traders who have often exhausted possibilities for deriving a livelihood from the land. Here, too, the market is a node of tense and often volatile relations across social, religious and linguistic differences, characterised in the case of Wamena by visibly racialized divisions of labour between indigenous Papuans and migrants from other Indonesian islands. As in *Sadovod*, these distinctions are not stable or binary. Instead, the market serves as a site for the articulation and amplification of multiple lines of difference and competition according to place of origin and ethnic affiliation.

Nerenberg explores how these tensions can become magnified through fear, rumour and the (in)action of the Indonesian security forces, transforming convivial relations into prospectively violent confrontations, when one or other community is felt to be privileged by the introduction of new regulations, such as the prohibition of Sunday trading. These tensions, he shows, have traceable linkages to the broader inequities of Papua's incorporation into the Indonesian state. The peripherality of Wamena's 'terminal economy', in other words, is not simply a product of geographical remotes, but is the result of durable dynamics of colonial incorporation grounded in asymmetrical extraction.

Historicity

If the marginal hubs explored in this Special Issue—be they China’s ‘villages in the city’, Russia’s container markets, or modern border posts on the Bangladesh-India border—are not sites of historic cosmopolitanism, this does not mean that they are not informed by historical dynamics or indeed that those who inhabit them are not historically aware.³⁰ Indeed, people in several of the marginal hubs that feature in this Special Issue actively emplace themselves imaginatively in relationship to histories of, or paths towards, conviviality. The fraught and violent histories that often lie behind the emergence of marginal hubs do not of course unfold in territories that have forever been ungoverned and are merely the dormitories of the world’s industrial and military labour force. Marginal hubs, rather, arise from processes that tear apart centres from their hinterlands, and do so in a manner that has long-term consequences for both. As Cho’s article demonstrates, peripheries might be actively made as people chose to vacate historic cores for emergent yet marginal centres. The individuals and communities drawn to marginal hubs in the wake of such diverse processes carry with them their own modes of engaging with difference. In some contexts, such histories of conviviality might be directly and consciously connected to historical narratives that depict that marginalisation and exclusion of regions and contexts from once convivially connected worlds.

Till Mostowlansky’s article addresses the historicity of the forms of conviviality found in marginal hubs by focusing on the ‘potential for shared lives’ in the Pamirs, a region that cuts across the boundaries of Tajikistan, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan. In recent years, however, the Pamirs has also seen the development of economic and infrastructural projects that place great symbolic and economic emphasis on ‘regional connectivity’, notably China’s ‘Belt and Road’ project and the ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor’. Mostowlansky documents and analyses the ‘oscillating’ form of connectedness and disconnectedness between a small town in Tajikistan (Khorog) and a small town in northern Pakistan (Karimabad). The analytical motivation for exploring the ‘ephemeral’ forms of conviviality—often also ‘marked by silence’—that intermittently connect these two towns together is the shared sense on the part of their inhabitants of their having once belonged to a shared space. Mostowlansky aptly refers to this sense of the past as the ‘charging of the past within the present and vice versa’. The shared region to which the inhabitants of these towns intermittently claim a sense of collective attachment cuts across Cold War boundaries, those of present-day nation states of Tajikistan, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, as well as imperial-era geopolitical boundaries between the Russian and British ‘spheres of influence’. Life in this ‘borderland’ has resulted in its peoples having complex, if not uneasy, relations with their superordinate political entities over the course of the past two centuries. For Mostowlansky, this informs the ways in which, in both Khorog and Karimabad, there is a sense of being at the epicentre of inter-Asian and even global connections but simultaneously also of experiencing marginalisation from political power. Such tensions also powerfully inform the ways in which people in the two towns relate to a shared past in the absence of their physically crossing the boundaries of the two nation states in which they reside. At a general level, inhabitants of Khorog and Karimabad regard themselves as being bound by ties of culture and history but dissected by different types and

³⁰ Humphrey and Skvirskaja have indeed compared post-Soviet ‘container markets’ to nineteenth century Russian trade fairs. See C. Humphrey and V. Skvirskaja, ‘Trading Places: post-Socialist Container Markets and the City’, *Focaal* vol. 55, 2009, pp. 61–73.

degrees of modernity. While affiliation in both towns to the Ismai'li form of the Islamic tradition offers ground for collective commitment to shared ethical principles across the space, these principles are often also geographically moored to the region in a manner that makes possible distinctions with further Ismai'li communities in the transnational realm. Past trajectories and future horizons of cross-border conviviality are evoked, then, in the context of a fragmentary present in which the nation-state lingers 'amidst local and transnational boundaries'. The complex infusion between past and present indeed is further underscored by Mostowlanksy in his discussion of how one of the most likely sites for inhabitants from the two towns to physically interact today is in one of the region's former imperial centres: London.

Conclusion

As a wide range of scholarship in recent years has shown, the processes through which moral relations, identities and selves are fashioned in particular contexts involve the repeated and purposeful deployment of disciplining practices and modes of self-control that are pursued with the intention of achieving a particular definition of the good.³¹ In our understanding, the enactment of conviviality is not a care-free, thought-free, lackadaisical mode of sociality that effortlessly results in social if shallow forms of bonhomie. Nor is conviviality 'merely' performed for some narrowly instrumental end: to maximise profit, to avoid the costs of conflict, to keep a trade relation going. Rather, the effort of conviviality is to be located not only in the repeated and sustained enactment of convivial ways of doing things, but also imaginatively in the continual and ongoing capacity and willingness to interpret such forms of behaviour in a frame that opens rather than closes the possible spaces for future interaction and engagement.

The papers contained in this collection reveal both this element of effort, and the creative dynamism of this moment of reframing—in the decision to interpret an ethnic slur shouted at a market-stall as 'friendly banter' rather than a source of offence, for instance; or in the reframing of an asymmetrical border encounter as an unforced act of hospitality. We have argued in this collection that marginal hubs—precisely because of their ephemerality, their indeterminacy, their lack of easy categorisation—provide a privileged site for exploring such efforts ethnographically, and for attending to the modes of framing through which informants reason about, and reflect upon, the circumstances of their (co)existence.

Beyond this empirical contribution, 'marginal hubs' pose a theoretical challenge to the burgeoning exploration of space, scale and connectivity in the historical and anthropological study of modern Asia. Marginal hubs are places in which encounters with difference are a pervasive feature of daily life, yet such sites exist beyond the continent's celebrated urban centres. Indeed, marginal hubs do not fit easily into the conventional binaries through which social life has tended to be explored: urban versus rural, mountain versus lowland, inland versus oceanic, connected versus disconnected, within or beyond the gaze of the centralising state. Perhaps as a result of the uneasy relationship of marginal hubs to conventional scales of analysis, they trouble the limits and boundaries of (sub-)continental thinking in a more explicit

³¹ See, programmatically, S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

manner than is the case for more general models of Asian 'sites of interaction'.³² The case studies presented within this Special Issue call upon us to actively interrogate the very category of 'Asia' as a self-evident framework for enquiry. As Mostowlansky shows, for instance, it is precisely the awareness of living amidst cold-war borders between South and Central Asia that fosters the particular modes of convivial sensibility and curiosity that inform the historical enquiries and 'scale-making projects' of his Pamiri interlocutors. Nor is that working-out moored to any finite 'Asian' territory. As Nikolotov reveals, Moscow markets and peri-urban shashlyk gatherings can be paradigmatic sites for working out inter-Asian modes of getting along between Vietnamese, Afghan, Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz traders, just as Jiagongchang workshops in Guangzhou are critical nodes in the production of 'Australian' fashion. Indeed, ethnographic attention to marginal hubs of the kind that we attempt in this collection reveals the ways in which 'Asia' itself becomes part of the imaginative framework through which conviviality is negotiated, and claims to sameness and difference reflected upon in the interstices of daily life.

³² T. Harper and S. Amrith, 'Sites of Asian Interaction: An Introduction', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 46, no. 2, 2012, pp. 249-257